

ANSWERS

BY AMERICAN PROFESSORS OF PUBLIC FINANCE
TO QUESTIONNAIRE ON TAXATION WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO THE RELATIONSHIPS OF THE
FEDERAL TAX SYSTEM ON THE ONE HAND AND
OF THE STATE-AND-LOCAL ON THE OTHER.

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(Report as of January 1, 1936)

The question in each column was whether the respondent favored the indicated situation. In this tabulation Y (= Yes) or N (= No) has been entered where it was the only reply and also where the respondent added some discussion but making it plain that his general position was either Y or N. The *, meaning too many doubts and qualifications for an answer of either Yes or No, has been entered where it was the respondent's sole reply and also where there was given some discussion which made it apparent that Yes or No was not the predominant attitude of the respondent. The limitations of this questionnaire method necessitate that every Y and N be taken as the general position of the respondent and not his position under all circumstances. In fact there are doubtless frequently many exceptions to his general attitude. Every one of the collaborating professors will probably recognize these limitations and it is hoped this statement will make the matter completely clear to every one else. Useful as this final printed table is, it can, nevertheless, be seriously abused by anyone who does not appreciate this situation. And one of the worst abuses would be the citing or imputing of inconsistencies in the replies of any given individual while assuming that the Y's and N's are complete answers, whereas if space permitted the complete answers would show the respondent was entirely consistent with himself throughout. And in every case the reader should understand that the replies reflect the attitude of the individual professor and he must not assume that they reflect the attitude of the college.

Interesting and important as are the replies of each professor considered by themselves, the primary usefulness of the table, however, is the general picture which it presents. It probably is the first time in history that anybody has been able to get a definite and approximately accurate idea of what prevailing American tax opinion really is. The table shows clearly various matters about which there is a great preponderance of opinion, various matters about which there is very divided opinion, and it indicates many matters where it is difficult to formulate unambiguous questions. But it should be realized that all of the matters inquired about are to be decided by our law makers one way or the other.

It is believed that the respondents themselves prefer to have the table briefer and more condensed because of the omission of the numerous qualifications which many of them added. The table is sufficiently unwieldy as it is but it would have been much more unwieldy if it had included such supplementary addenda. If a majority or a considerable percentage of the professors desire to have this tabulation an annual matter, an inquiry can be included with the view to finding out whether they prefer to have the final table elaborated to include the various qualifications or whether they prefer to have the table condensed by excluding them, and future tabulations can be governed accordingly. If this is to become an annual matter every effort possible will be made to make it as significant as possible. And any proposed revisions of the inquiries or of any individual inquiry will be welcome.

It is desirable to include here the letter of invitation to collaborate which was sent to the university presidents.

Dear Mr. President:

It is earnestly hoped that the matter submitted herewith will impress you as being of sufficient importance to deserve your effective cooperation.

A long and varied experience in the public service convinces me that the policies of governing officials in America have been influenced too little by the best technical and scientific thought and experience of those who really know the most about many of our difficult governmental problems. Also, it is believed

that, without hope of gain, a very great amount of the highest grade of scientific work is being carried on in America because of a desire to do something in the interest of the public.

Entertaining these views, I am anxious, as President of the New York Tax Commission and as Chairman of the Federal-State Planning Committee of the Tax Revision Council of the American Legislators Association, to obtain a comprehensive picture of matured, responsible and independent tax opinion. Such an authoritative word picture or summary will be a powerful influence in molding official opinion. In addition to being useful to our Commission and the work of the committee to which I have alluded, it will profoundly impress those who formulate governmental fiscal policies, materially assist those who are trying to develop plans for coordinating and integrating federal and state tax systems and exercise a powerful influence on the thinking of students in the field of public finance whether within or without the public service.

For this and other reasons, I respectfully urge that you request the senior professor (emeritus or active) in public finance in your institution, to answer as many of the questions here listed as he is able conscientiously to do. If the senior professor is not available to undertake this assignment, will you not ask the ranking professor who is available to enter the replies. The objective is to obtain the considered opinions of 200 professors, one from each of the 200 larger institutions of higher learning in the United States, plus the opinions of a selected group of recognized authorities from other walks of life. It is believed that such a representative response will produce the effect of a weighted average. Obviously, the more eminent the authority and the greater the number of men who have accepted his views the larger will be the percentage of persons entertaining those opinions. Let me stress the point that if the results of this effort are to be accepted as a correct reflection of mature American opinion, it will be necessary to secure a large number of replies. The final table which will be printed and distributed widely will contain the name of each respondent, his replies and the total answers in the affirmative and in the negative.

It will be observed that the design is to make (a) each inquiry as simple but as comprehensive as possible; (b) each question capable of being answered with a categorical "yes" or "no"; and (c) the questions impartial, colorless, and devoid of any attempt to commit one in favor of a given answer. If a respondent is in doubt or feels that he should materially qualify a "yes" or "no" answer in order truly to reflect his opinion, he is asked to enter a star (*) indicating that fact.

That no one need feel he is volunteering his efforts in a project for which someone else is receiving pay, let me add that no funds are available with which to pay a special staff and that for the aggregation of the answers I shall rely upon those who are already receiving salaries in connection with their professional and research work.

If responses to this questionnaire come up to expectations I am confident that governments in this country in the future will seek in a similar way to ascertain the consensus of opinion of those most competent to express opinions about many of our difficult governmental problems.

As it is now planned to have a meeting of the federal-state planning committee in September or early October, will you not let me know saying whether it will be possible to comply with this request and, if so, about when we may expect the filled-in questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,
MARK GRAVES,
Commissioner.

